

KENNETH A. FINIS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
AFRO-AMERICANS IN SAN FRANCISCO
PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

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Kenneth A. Finis Date 7/14/78
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The Friends of the San Francisco Public Library and
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Project Coordinator: Lynn Bonfield

INTERVIEW WITH KENNETH FINIS

JUNE 7, 1978

At the home of Mr. Finis, San Francisco, California

Interviewer: Jesse J. Warr, III

Transcriber: Linda Burnham

BEGIN TAPE 1:3

JW: We can begin with your birthplace and date.

KF: Let's see, my name is Ken Finis and I was born at Children's Hospital on November 24, 1926. I'm fifty-one years old. I was raised out on 32nd Avenue between Clement and California. The cliffs in Lincoln Park and outer Golden Gate Park were my playgrounds as a kid. What is now James B. Phelan Beach was called China Beach in those days.

JW: Why was it called that?

KF: Well, you'd have to ask one of the real old-timers that. (Laughs)

JW: Were there Chinese in that area where you grew up?

KF: Well, there was a Chinese cemetery. In my mother's day, they had a railroad train that went around--a steam train that went around the cliffs. And I vaguely remember the building of the Golden Gate Bridge. It was completed after the Bay Bridge. But from my playground out there...Land's End, between Land's End and China Beach... there used to be a number of popular picnic places out there. But due to erosion...one place at Land's End Beach there used to be a popular picnic resort, for people who lived in the outer Richmond. And the WPA built some comfort stations which I think are still there. The erosion has caved in most of that part. But that's a very pleasant recollection. And also I took classes on Saturday's... I used to like the Legion of Honor.

JW: The Palace.

KF: The Palace of the Legion of Honor. That was one of my favorite spots out there.

JW: Wasn't it foggy out there a lot?

KF: Oh, yes. The weather in San Francisco in those days was a lot cooler, generally speaking. I can remember as a kid reading in the newspaper when it got up to seventy, it was a heat wave. And people would pass out on Market Street. (Laughter) I grew up thinking this was the way the world was: foggy and damp, salty. The fog used to be right down on the ground. We have a lot of overcast now. But in those days the fog was right down on the ground. You talk about pea-soup fog, we used to have it. We don't really have pea-soup fog any more. But we really used to have it where you couldn't see the corner and all that. So I grew up in the fog, and to this day, I'm very uncomfortable with heat, with warm weather, unless I'm out on the beach or something. But if I have to work or something, I'm very uncomfortable to this day in heat.

JW: Were there any particular stories about your birth that were told? Were they expecting a boy? Any comments along that line?

KF: No.

JW: What was your mother's name?

KF: Ethel Henry. That was her maiden name.

JW: And was she a San Franciscan?

KF: No, she was born in Los Angeles. The roots of the family on my father's side go back to Missouri and come through Montana, Idaho, and into San Francisco. On my mother's side, my grandmother was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and they came up to California close to the end of slavery time.

JW: They came as slaves?

KF: No, no. After they were freed.

JW: Oh, I see.

KF: My great aunt I mentioned grew up in Los Angeles, but was born in Waco, Texas. This was around the '80's I guess, somewhere in there. And then the family moved to Los Angeles and worked their way up here. Aunt Maud came up here first. And then my grandmother and their mother, my great grandmother, moved up to Pacific Grove. The family had property there for many, many years. It's too bad we still don't have it. But for many years they lived in Pacific Grove,

- KF: the Monterey Bay area...my mother's side. At the same time, on my father's side, some of his sisters and brothers who came out to California went down the Peninsula...Palo Alto, mainly, and Redwood City. This probably was around World War I, somewhere around in there. And I'm not sure how my father got to San Francisco.
- JW: The family of your maternal grandmother...were they Creole?
- KF: No.
- JW: How did they get from Louisiana to California?
- KF: I guess overland.
- JW: They came out in the 1880's?
- KF: Well, they probably came by train. I don't know when the Santa Fe and all that was built. We've got an old trunk downstairs that allegedly goes back to slavery days, with the name Marshall on it. That must have been the slave owner or something. That's been the family story at any rate.
- JW: Were there other stories about slavery that they ever talked to you about in particular?
- KF: Well, my great grandmother apparently was born in slavery. But I never knew her. We have pictures in the family of her, but I never knew her personally. Although they all tell me I should have remembered her, but I was too young to recall. So on both sides of the family there are passed along recollections of being bought and sold like cattle. But I never knew any living person who had actually experienced it. On the other hand, on my father's side, many of them were Union soldiers. That's how they came to Montana, Idaho. They kind of came the northern route.
- JW: Right. We'll turn to them in a minute. I was wondering, how did the family support itself in Pacific Grove? What kind of business were they in?
- KF: Well, both my grandmother and my great aunt were professional cooks. My great aunt, Maude Wheeler, or Rivers, she had cooked in mining camps, and she'd done just about everything in cooking. My grandmother, as I recall, was more of a domestic cook. Aunt Maud had been a domestic cook at times, but she earlier had been a commercial cook. My grandmother remarried when my mother was a child. Am I answering your questions?
- JW: Right.

- KF: Okay. And somehow they wound up in Berkeley. They used to show me as a kid on Sunday outings where the factory that my West Indian step-grandfather had his jute mill. This was before San Quentin had a jute mill.
- JW: Jute is the material that they make rope from?
- KF: Rope and bags, you know, like potato bags.
- JW: Okay.
- KF: And my mother used to talk about having to work long hours as a little kid in this jute mill factory.
- JW: How did the West Indian step-grandfather come to the Bay Area? Do you know?
- KF: Well, yes. San Francisco's a port, and many West Indians were sailors. And there used to be a sizable...within the four or five thousand blacks in San Francisco, say during the thirties...a fairly sizeable number were of West Indian descent. And also black Portuguese... Afro-Portuguese. Because San Francisco being a port, and they were a seafaring people. So that around North Beach, a lot of black Portuguese were out there, as well as West Indians.
- JW: Speaking of Portuguese primarily? As their language?
- KF: Not publicly so much, but they had a decided accent. You could tell the difference between the Portuguese accent and of course the West Indian accent. The Southern black patois I knew very little of. It wasn't until I was in the army that I found out what "Fatback" was.
- JW: Did the Afro-Portuguese and West Indians consider themselves part of the black community at large, or were they a distinct and separate group?
- KF: Okay. One of the key words here is "at large". The black people, both American and West Indian and Portuguese, in San Francisco made a clear, decided, and deliberate attempt to keep San Francisco integrated in terms of housing and schooling. It was not by any accident that I was raised out on 32nd Avenue. The one thing that the blacks in San Francisco, going back to Gold Rush and earlier times, they were integrationists. My parents and all of the blacks prior to World War II were integrationists as far as housing, school, and jobs. And they were integrationists to a fault. My mother would never understand "Black Power". She would have understood "workers' power" or "class power". The contradiction was that San Francisco had integrated housing, but the East Bay and Los Angeles had the jobs because they lived in the ghetto and had Black Power, you see.

- JW: We sort of didn't answer the question about the West Indians with the other Afro-Americans.
- KF: There was no conflict here. There may have been in the East. I've heard about that in New York and places like that. But not here, I don't recall.
- JW: Did they have...were they considered...To marry into a West Indian family there was no status one way or the other. You didn't raise or lower your status?
- KF: No. They were a very industrious group. Back in the Thirties, like I said, my step-grandfather built a factory. And that factory was there until San Quentin started making jute.
- JW: What was the name of the factory, do you know?
- KF: You'll have to ask my brother-in-law. He probably had that kind of detail.
- JW: Okay. But it was in Berkeley?
- KF: Yes. But old man Gumbs had the first parking lot, to my knowledge, in North Beach. And he held it up until fairly recently. He started out in the middle of the Thirties, getting a parking lot. People didn't think about parking lots in those days. And they...he had the parking lot in North Beach.
- JW: His name was what again?
- KF: It was Gumbs.
- JW: Okay. Also, going back again, the women who came out found work as cooks. What were their husbands doing?
- KF: Well, my grandfather, my step-grandfather, the West Indian, he died under mysterious circumstances. Some people suspected suicide. I never really knew him. His name...These names keep coming. Then my grandmother, as I recall, living on Russian Hill, her husband that I knew, now he wasn't my biological grandfather...he came afterwards ...but he was in fact my grandfather, he worked at the S.P. yards. Most of the, on my father's side, a good many of the men worked for the S.P. Railroad. Either on field gangs or as Redcaps or what have you. There used to be a Redcaps Hall which was at one time where the I.L.W.U. was at 150 Golden Gate. And they were a powerful group in the heyday of the railroad. And they had a good job. I don't remember any unemployment during the Thirties in my family among the men.

- JW: But you don't remember what your biological grandfather was doing down in Pacific Grove? Was he a farmer or a rancher or a miner?
- KF: I think my grandmother must have separated from her husband down in L.A. somewhere.
- JW: What was your father's name?
- KF: Richard Finis.
- JW: And he was born where?
- KF: He was born in Sedalia, Missouri. I'm not sure when he came out here but I suspect it was around World War I. And he was a mechanic. He and an Italian fellow had a garage which is still there on Filbert near Fillmore. It used to be called the Filbert Garage. They both worked about twelve-hour shifts until they quit...I remember in my recollection that they cut down to where they were closed after midnight. They worked six days a week and basically they were kind of partners. I guess they just leased the building, because when my father died there was nothing about a settlement or what have you. I think somebody else owned the building. But he was an auto mechanic, and this was back in the days before the different auto manufacturers used to make their own repairs. That's when you see all these big old garages around...those usually date back prior to when the manufacturers did their own servicing and so forth.
- JW: How did he meet this Italian?
- KF: I don't know.
- JW: What was the Italian's name, do you remember?
- KF: [Shakes head] When we were out on 32nd Avenue there were a number of Italian families around there. And also there was the Thompson family out there. Johnny Mathis was raised in the Thompson family home. Thompson...Ray Thompson...is with the Berkeley Co-op now. He's a senior citizen himself now. But I remember his father and his brothers. And they also lived on the same block...as a matter of fact, it was old man Thompson who sold the house to my father, out there. And they worked in the Post Office, I think.
- JW: Can you recall any stories that come down in the family about the Civil War and their involvement in it?
- KF: Well, apparently, on my father's side, the men must have been into [slave] rebellion of one kind or another. I guess that's how some of them got to be Union soldiers, and where the name "finest" [Finis] came from. As for my mother's side, I remember Aunt Maud saying that her mother had said...they happened to be in Texas at the time,

- KF: Waco, Texas...that when they had heard about Juneteenth, and she said her mother used to tell her stories about when they first heard about freedom and they liked that old song, "Thank God A'Mighty, We're Free at Last!". Not "almighty" but "a'mighty". Aunt Maud can mimic that Southern dialect very well. But there was nobody in my family that had a genuine Southern dialect. The family on my father's side has a Harry Truman-type Missouri accent. With a touch of Oklahoma. You could spot that anywhere, but if you were just listening, it could be White or Black. But it was a definite Oklahoma and Missouri accent.
- JW: Do you want to tell me again how the family happened to leave Missouri and go to Montana?
- KF: I gather it had something to do with settling Union veterans' bonuses through land grants. It just so happened that the land happened to be owned and occupied by the Indians. You know, this was long before Custer's Last Stand.
- JW: And so they got land from the government and moved on it and became farmers?
- KF: Yes.
- JW: And then what made them come to California?
- KF: That part isn't clear. I don't really know why either side came when they did. It seems to have been destined. There were no stops anywhere else...on my mother's side...they were coming to California. Of course, Los Angeles was like Foster City or something in terms of size in those days. It was a little country town.
- JW: Did your mother have an education?
- KF: Well, she graduated from high school and had a...I think in Berkeley ...and had a scholarship to U.C., but at the time she had, or they thought she had had, tuberculosis. My mother tended to be on the sickly side, but with a great deal of energy. She probably was the first in her family and probably my father's family to have graduated from high school. Where they met and how they met I don't know.
- JW: What about your father's education?
- KF: Probably elementary school. But he was kind of a self-taught kind of person. And the story that I grew up with, I wouldn't be surprised if it was true, my father was the kind of man that was an electrical genius. And I remember all of the apparatus...we used to have a big barn in the backyard...and I just haven't thought about that for years.
- JW: Out on 32nd Avenue?

- KF: Yes. And that was his workshop. And we kids were forbidden to go into that barn. It was a two-story barn, I'm just remembering it, and he had an office in that barn and had kind of a lab and so forth, working on experimental-type things. It's said that he invented the blinking light, and that he got screwed out of it through the patent attorney.
- JW: What's a blinking light?
- KF: You know, "dink, dink, dink, dink". Like if you signal for a left turn.
- JW: Oh, yes. Did he ever tell you about a man named Lewis Latimer? Lewis Latimer was one of the Edison Pioneers...Did your parents ever talk about any confrontations they had with racism, what we would consider racism?
- KF: Of course they would have called it "prejudice"...Not really. My mother was a housewife until my father died when I was ten or eleven years old, and then she went downtown to a beauty school...this was in the Thirties, '37 I think...and it was a White beauty school. She graduated from there, then went down to Los Angeles for a while.
- JW: What was she learning there?
- KF: Cosmetology. And then she was the first supervising teacher when they had the Black school over the Temple Theater. She was the supervising teacher there and used to...what we would now call "consult" with various beauty shops in terms of their business management and this and that and the other. And I remember her doing hair for a while, but I guess she liked teaching more.
- JW: Did she do hair at home?
- KF: No, she did hair in a shop for a while. But then she got out of that and was asked by the School to be the supervising teacher and also help independent operators get set up and so forth.
- JW: Were most of her clients Black or White?
- KF: Black. Barber shops and beauty shops were, and to this day, are voluntarily segregated.
- JW: Okay. How many brothers and sisters did you have?
- KF: I have a living sister and a deceased brother who, incidentally, was the first Black Civil Service policeman. They had an article in the Chronicle a while back on him. The family's first confrontation...well, no, there was a confrontation, I had forgotten about that. I don't remember this, but at one time there was a threat to burn down the home on 32nd Avenue. And my father hired a White security guard to protect the house.

JW: Who was threatening?

KF: Apparently some neighbors, but it was long before my time.

JW: So this was when they first moved there?

KF: Now I don't even know when they moved there.

JW: Was it your father's house? Did the family own the house?

KF: Yes, they bought it.

JW: Are you the middle child?

KF: No, I'm the youngest.

JW: Put your family in order.

KF: My sister is the oldest.

JW: And her name?

KF: Patricia. Cynthia Patricia Finis. She's always used Patricia. And she's Levi Harper's wife. And my brother Dick Finis, named after my father Richard, when he...in those days the examination for the police and firemen was the same written exam, kind of a general education-type thing, plus physicals, this, that, and the other. So if you passed one you had an option which you wanted to go into: the police or the fire department. Well, his plans were going to school, and there was no better job, still isn't any better job for someone going to school than to become a fireman. Guys who go through med school, dental school and gobs of lawyers, by being firemen. But they told him that if he chose the fire department ...this was before they had a fire fighters' union, there used to be, what was the name of that club? [David Scannel?] ...It was a very racist group, and they told him if he chose the fire department, they'd flunk him out on the physical or something. In those days they didn't give orals, so they couldn't flunk him on an oral and he'd already passed the written. So he chose to go on the police department because at least he could work nights. So that was our first confrontation, other than the incident that I don't recall. But I do recall that.

JW: Could you describe the house that you grew up in?

KF: Well, it was a big house, and counting basement rooms, it was a ten-room house. Shingled, set back from the street I'd say about twenty, thirty feet. My father was an avid gardener. But he loved shrubbery and trees rather than flowers. The only flowers he cared much about were roses. As I say, looking back, it was on a big lot. And it was about thirty-five or forty by one hundred and thirty-five deep.

END TAPE

JW: Was it larger or smaller? How did it compare with other houses in the neighborhood?

KF: Much larger.

JW: Did that reflect a comparable amount of status in the community? Did people envy your location or the size of the house?

KF: Well, it wasn't, as I say, it wasn't an exception because Blacks lived all over the city. There were a few Blacks in between, say, Divisadero and Presidio. There were some Blacks in the Fillmore; there were always some Blacks in the Fillmore. The older part of Black history was around North Beach and Chinatown and on through there; then after 1906, the Western Addition.

JW: Speaking more in terms of your immediate neighbors, they were mostly Italian I think you were saying?

KF: They were White. There were some Italians. The guy who owned the store was part of the family that owned QFI...Quality Foods Incorporated. They had a big house. There were big houses and cottages. But these were not shacky-type cottages. These were well kept up. But you see, when you had the big houses you had big, big families. And so the people whose families were bigger than ours, they had the big houses...and usually stucco as opposed to ours being shingle. Well now, shingles are the expensive houses now, but...

JW: How did you get along, how did the family get along with the neighbors in general?

KF: Oh, fine. By the time I came along, no problems.

JW: Did you have visitors at the house frequently?

KF: Oh, yes.

JW: Were they neighbors, family?

KF: Mostly Black friends of my parents. But neighbors did come by.

JW: Who were your friends as a very small child?

KF: Well, as a school-age child, say kindergarten up, they were mostly White. But there were other Black families that lived in the Richmond. The Haskells were one. Dave Haskell is a very dear friend of mine. Kent Fisher who, as long as I've known Kent, he's lived on Scott Street...I'll never forget the address, 1812. But you see, these were friends of the parents and these were the offspring of friends of the parents. These were not people that I had just run into and met. The people I used to run into and meet were largely White. But the others were through a network of families, the offspring of families.

JW: Were there any children that you were told not to play with?

KF: Hoodlums, but these were usually White hoodlums.

JW: Were there hoodlums around?

KF: Yes. They were White.

JW: What did they do? You mean petty vandalism types of things or something more serious?

KF: Well, by today's standard, it'd be trifling. (Laughter)

JW: When you were growing up, what kinds of things did your parents specifically tell you to do?

KF: I once wrote an article as a graduate student, which I later published as a psychologist, called "Stereotype Anxiety". And this was true of all Black, relatively middle income...using a Black scale, it was "middle income"...was that you were to be a living denial of the stereotype about Blacks. And I was just seeing a young...But this is still true. Some of my Black patients are still trying to live down the stereotype. And I once wrote an article on this. Those days, it just wasn't done to eat watermelon in public because that confirmed the stereotype.

JW: But you liked it and brought it inside and ate it?

KF: Yes. I'd go to the store and buy and take it home.

JW: What other kinds of things were you not supposed to do?

KF: Number one, you weren't supposed to verify the stereotype. That was clear.

JW: That means laughing loud in public or...

KF: Anything which verifies the stereotype.

JW: Well, I'm trying to get at what was the stereotype as they saw it?

KF: Negroes being lazy or dirty or shiftless, "gettin" and "gwine" type speech. (Laughs) All of this...to this day, I still can't enjoy Fats Waller. I became a musician for a period. Well, I took music from junior high school on through, but we'd always had a piano... we all took piano lessons. In those days, it was just understood you took piano lessons.

JW: Even the boys?

KF: Yes. My sister became an accomplished pianist and also an artist. And there was a period, a brief period in my life, where I was a musician.

JW: What instrument?

KF: I played the trumpet. I had been trained in the public schools and I took some private lessons, but these were mostly classical lessons. And by accident, when I was in the Army in World War II, at the end of World War II...my brother was in for some time, three or four years, but I was too young to go in, so I didn't go in until the end, in 1945, May of 1945. But you see, a lot of the guys who were four or five years older than me were getting discharged when we were going in. So that meant, when I got assigned to Clovis, New Mexico, that their band was breaking up and they needed a trumpet player. The trumpet player had already been discharged. So the first...the Blacks kind of ran this base in New Mexico...of course, I don't know if you want to get up to World War II. But they found out that in my Military Occupational Specialties that I was a trumpet player. So they had me send back and get my trumpet. But I'd never played with a small jazz group...I'd played in the bigger bands, with white musicians, jazz, but you know, written down and this and that.

JW: Not improvised.

KF: Yes.

JW: What kind of chores were you assigned to do around the house?

KF: Oh, the conventional ones. Empty the garbage, sweep the kitchen floor, keep the basement clean.

JW: Did you help your father with the gardening?

KF: Yes. As long as we didn't interfere. He was a weed-puller. It never interested him to put anything else down, like a lawn or ground cover. But he didn't care much about the ground. We had fruit trees, and fruit trees in foggy San Francisco never developed much, but he loved those trees and he loved the shrubbery. And if we goofed up, boy...My father was probably typical of his day, from his background. He was the kind of person who could, if he had had to, have cut off his own leg because he had to save himself, he could do it, with equanimity. But as for a tender, loving father, no. He was a stern disciplinarian.

JW: Did he whip you or beat you?

- KF: Oh, yes. And if he said something to you once, that was supposed to last forever. But a lot of the men of his era were like that.
- JW: Did he treat the boys differently than the girls? Did you have less work to do than they?
- KF: There was one girl. You know, she did the usual thing of washing dishes. We all had to do some of that. We had to do pretty much what kids had to do, what our neighbors' kids, the White neighbors' kids, had to do. Pretty much the same thing.
- JW: What kinds of games did you play?
- KF: Oh, the usual games. We used to play, up the block, a block up between Clement and Geary, we used to play touch football with a tennis ball. That was my closest playground, with the White kids up in the next block. And there wasn't any racial strife. Where we came into racial strife was not from the kids and their parents, but from the school system. See, they had gerrymandered...see, all our family should have been going to Lafayette out on 36th and Balboa. And my mother was determined that that was precisely where we were going to go. There was nothing wrong with Alamo...but by god, they drew a circle around us, and by god, we were going to go to Lafayette. And we did, all three of us. And I'll never forget, the principal would come in and she would, in front of the class, say how my mother had begged for me to attend Lafayette...she used to do that, whenever I saw her, you could count...whatever else she was there for, you know. My mother had fought with her, she hadn't begged anybody. She fought with the Board of Education and won. And that principal just couldn't stand that...Mrs. Hauselt[?].
- JW: How did the family spend its leisure time together?
- KF: Well, there were all these family picnics and things like this. Or church picnics, things like that.
- JW: Which church did you belong to?
- KF: Bethel A.M.E., which at that time was located on Powell between Jackson and Pacific. I remember that where the Ping Yuen is now there used to be a Father Divine restaurant there. Excellent food. We'd go there after church sometimes. For fifteen cents you'd get a big chicken dinner, more than you could eat. "Peace is Wonderful", something like that, that was the salutation at the door.
- JW: Right. Was your father...did you spend much time with him?

- KF: He was a very distant person. He very rarely came to family dinners because he spent his time either working at the garage or working at the house. It was, looking back on it, probably a labor of love. But you could never look at it and tell he ever enjoyed anything. You talk about a Cotton Mather-type. I mean he wasn't religious.
- JW: So you got your religion from your mother?
- KF: Yes.
- JW: Was she very religious?
- KF: Not very. She certainly was a Christian and believed in the teachings of Christ. Not necessarily the teachings of the Church. But she thought it was important for the kids to have church. They talked me into being an altar boy and I went through that for some time, several years. And I learned so much about the sordid side of the church that I became an atheist for the next forty years.
(Laughs)
- JW: When did you announce to your family that you had become an atheist?
- KF: I never announced it.
- JW: Did you ever quit going to church?
- KF: Yes.
- JW: And how did your mother take that?
- KF: Okay. Looking back on it, I could have quit any time I wanted to. But everybody said, "Oh, it's so wonderful"...my aunts and their friends. I wondered how in the hell, I could get out of this. My brother and sister never went.
- JW: Never?
- KF: Well, they went to Sunday School and, once in a while, they might go to church. My mother, sometimes. The person who was most active in church was my grandmother. I remember her as a deaconess.
- JW: This was which family?
- KF: Maternal.
- JW: Okay.
- KF: Aunt Maud's sister. She was a deaconess. And since I felt obligated to go and be the altar boy...they had two altar boys and one of them died. My grandmother and Aunt Maud thought this was something great ...to be an altar boy. I don't think my mother cared too much one

KF: way or another. Then my aunt used to play the organ. I guess the A.M.E. was more of a status church than some others. Third Baptist is just a couple of years older. I think Bethel goes back to 1852. I think Third Baptist goes back to 1850 in terms of being formed. But, there wasn't that wide discrepancy among Black Protestant churches here that you would find, say, in other parts of the country, say, in the South someplace or in the East. The churches were pretty much the A.M.E. Zion Church, Third Baptist, and some years later on, there was, I think Catholic...

JW: St. Benedict the Moor.

KF: Yes.

JW: How did the family celebrate Christmas?

KF: We always had a family dinner somewhere. Someone in the family had a family dinner, either we had it or we went somewhere. The kids opened their Christmas presents.

JW: Did you put up a tree?

KF: Oh, yes. Very conventional. It wasn't any different then anybody else.

JW: Did you pretend Santa Claus existed for a while?

KF: I don't remember ever believing in Santa Claus. I don't think that either my mother or my father would have pushed that sort of thing.

JW: What about birthdays?

KF: Birthdays were important. And we used to give each other presents on birthdays. They were never important to me. Both my sister and brother had birthday parties which were never important to me.

JW: Did you ever have one?

KF: I don't remember ever having a birthday party, then as a kid. As a matter of fact, the only birthday parties that I've ever had are since June and I got married. They are very important to June. So anybody can pull a surprise birthday party for me because I never think about it. We'll be over some people's place having dinner, and then they tell me it's my birthday: "Happy Birthday!" (Laughs)

JW: Did you have a nickname as a child?

KF: Not really. "Kenny", which I don't particularly like. But some people are incorrigible, so they can call me Kenny, but I don't particularly like it.

JW: Apparently you were closer to your mother than to your father?

KF: Yes, in many respects. But in other respects, no. The old man sort of set a character model which was reinforced...My mother was a very gentle, loving person but, even being sickly, she was also a very strong person. Neither one of them ever drank or smoked. The only time my old man would ever have a drink would be if his brother from L.A. would come up. His brother from L.A., being the more typical, normal human being, would get the old man to have a couple of drinks. My folks would get booze for their friends at Christmas time, and their friends didn't hardly drink any more than they did. Hell, that booze would be there the next Christmas. They'd get three or four bottles of booze and that booze would still be there the next Christmas.

JW: Were you physically affectionate with your mother?

KF: She tended to be kind of smothering with me, a little bit. I had to object to it at times.

JW: Was that because you were the youngest, the baby?

KF: Yes. And I didn't like being called the baby, particularly after I got to be the tallest. My mother introduced me when I was a teenager as "her baby": "Sure is a big baby", [people would say]

JW: Were you afraid of your father?

KF: At times, yes.

JW: What about your brother and sister? Was it something that just happened, or did he actually want you to stand in fear?

KF: Well, I think that was the relationship with his father. And at times, he [my father] was explosive.

JW: With you, with your mother, with friends?

KF: Sometimes with my mother, sometimes...I seem to have caught the least of it.

JW: You said your mother was basically a warm, outgoing person.

KF: Yes. Very outgoing. Just the opposite of my father.

JW: How did she survive his death? He died when you were coming into puberty?

KF: Yes. Well, she went into the cosmetology, beautician thing. And there was a brief period when we were on relief, between the time my mother started getting going and my father's death. But even then, I don't remember any hardships. We always had enough to eat and we ate the same things everybody else in the neighborhood ate. My father was the kind of shopper, when he went to shop, he'd buy stuff by the case. My mother was the kind of shopper that would have you going back and forth to the store to get a cube of butter. Don't get a pound of butter, get a cube of butter. And we were always running back and forth to the store to get one of this. Whereas my father, he was just the opposite. My father also, remember my father was...How easily the term "psychosis" is used today, not during his day, but how easily people have ripped off "psychotic". But his judgment was very good, and with a genuine psychotic person, their judgment ain't gonna be too good. My family was very politically astute. I remember as a kid my father took me around to see the Longshore Strike in 1934, and explained, and took me all around town on the streetcars. And I've been active in the labor movement virtually ever since. There was a lot of character about him. He was the kind of person that if he gave you his word, you could go to sleep on that...You didn't have to worry about that any more. So he had a great deal of strength and character. But my mother did too.

JW: He must have had a tremendous amount of energy to keep a two-story barn going with inventions, keep a thirty-foot deep yard...

KF: That was the front yard. The backyard was bigger than that.

JW: And run a garage.

KF: Yes. And there was a time when he did night watchman. He was a workaholic. That's all he enjoyed. I remember we used to feel sorry for him because he worked so hard and he very seldom had enough time to come to family dinner. But he was a workaholic. I think when they closed the garage up at midnight, he started working as a night watchman. And my mother would go down on the streetcar and bring him his dinner. I remember going down there with her. He was a workaholic.

JW: What did he expect the boys to do when they grew up?

KF: Well, I remember when he was dying, he said he had hoped that I would be an attorney. In my family there wasn't any question but you're going to college...that was just understood, one way or another... that wasn't even discussed. It was understood that you were going to college. But it was my brother who graduated from law school; my sister went a couple of years to college, but then she had her own health problems and so she wasn't able to continue. But it wasn't even discussed. The only thing that my mother would say was, "When you go to college, you ought to take something that you can get a job in". But it wasn't whether you're going to college. That was never an issue.

JW: Did your mother remarry?

KF: No.

JW: Why do you think that was?

KF: I don't know. She died young. She died at the age of forty-eight. Both my parents and my brother, many years apart, died at the age of forty-eight. I was never so glad...not being a superstitious person ...but I was never so glad to turn forty-nine in my life! (Laughs)

JW: Who were your heroes when you were coming up?

KF: Joe Louis was one. We used to see all the big bands. They used to come down to the Golden Gate downtown.

JW: Is that the same Golden Gate Theater that's there now?

KF: Yes. They used to have...well, prior to my time...when I came along, they had movies, but prior to then they'd had vaudeville and stage shows. So the theaters were built for that. So if they had a big band, they just would move the screen out and they'd have a big band. We used to see all the big bands...Ellington, etc. I guess that's how I got into jazz and trumpet playing in particular, watching the big bands. But all of the bands of the Thirties and the Forties came to town. And I think my sister and brother had gone to nursery school. I didn't go to nursery school, I went to kindergarten. There used to be a nursery school over on Bush or Pine, somewhere over there. A guy who knows a lot about Black History in San Francisco is a guy named Harry Lumsden.

JW: How do you spell that?

KF: L-U-M-S-D-E-N. He knew my grandfather, he knows my whole family.

JW: Is he an Afro-American?

KF: He's a West Indian. And he is with the Shipyard Laborer's Union. He's an official there. And he always kids me and I kid him, but he's a very sharp guy. Now there's a guy you really ought to get in touch with.

JW: I will. Okay. But we were on the subject...you said Joe Louis was one of your heroes. Why was Joe Louis your hero?

KF: Well, he was everybody's hero, almost everybody. In San Francisco everything came to a halt when either F.D.R. had a Fireside Chat or Joe Louis had a fight. (Laughs)

JW: Do you remember anyone else that...

KF: Ah, well, Paul Robeson was a hero.

JW: Was this in the period of his singing or acting career or after he became a radical?

KF: Well, he had always been a radical. I saw him and Uta Hagen in "Othello" in 1945 when they were here. Forty-four or forty-five. I leaned towards the Black musicians. Let's see, Marian Anderson, Billie Holiday much later. I think it took a certain amount of maturity on my part to empathize with "Lady Day". But all of my friends and neighbors had White, athlete heroes, none of whom were particularly heroes to me. By the way, I ultimately became an All-City basketball player. I played center because in those days I was tall. And that was not a big sport with Blacks here in San Francisco. I was thinking the other day, I can't remember ever having played against a Black center. The Black kids went in mostly for football and baseball, in those days. Oh yeah, one time I did. Against my old buddy. See, I went to Washington High. I went to Lafayette, Presidio. At Presidio we were city-wide champs, in junior high school. Washington had a thing about basketball like Notre Dame does about football. So if you made Washington's first string, basketball quit being fun. It was like playing for the Warriors or something. You couldn't play in the playground...you were liable to get a sprained ankle or something. And those league games...now the practice games would be fun, but those league games, that was all business.

JW: When your father suggested that you become a lawyer, how did you respond to that?

KF: Well, he said it would be "nice"...

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- KF: [The Black middle class was into] adopting middle class White standards to a point, to a fault, being much more middle class than middle-class Whites. Regardless of what kind of work you do, it wasn't your job so much but 'how you carried yourself', as they would have said in my mother's day. And, for example, one of the most socially prominent among the Blacks was a guy who was the doorman down at Shreve's.
- JW: Yes, I'm interviewing his daughter at this point, Josephine Cole.
- KF: Oh, yes. She went to the same church.
- JW: I'm interviewing her tomorrow morning as a matter of fact.
- KF: Give her my love. (Laughs) She was the first Black schoolteacher.
- JW: Right. But you were saying...
- KF: Okay. The common "garden variety" poor southern Black was just something out there that there was a stereotype about, and what you saw in the movies, like Steppin' Fetchit and so forth. But I always thought Steppin' Fetchit was funny, (Laughs) and I'd go with my White friends and I'd be laughing too, you know. I thought he was a brilliant comedian. Albeit, but the fact is that the NAACP got on him because he verified the stereotype. And Rochester and these people verified the stereotype. So that they were "no-no's".
- JW: Rochester was a San Franciscan, wasn't he?
- KF: No. He lived in L.A. I don't know where he was from originally.
- JW: Oh, I see.
- KF: Yes. Hollywood, Jack Benny, all that. But even in L.A. the wealthy Blacks still lived in a wealthy Black ghetto, like in New York, Sugar Hill something like that. But, by the same token, by the time my brother became a cop in San Francisco, they had retired Black police captains in Oakland and in L.A., you see. There's the toss-up.
- JW: Going back to childhood just briefly again...When you were a child, what was most likely to make you angry, get you upset?
- KF: My sister teasing me. (Laughs)
- JW: Anything else that your parents would do or that your friends would do or that would happen in the community that would either frighten you or...

KF: Oh, injustice...if you get outside of the family. My family believed, and inculcated us with a strong sense of social justice. I remember one time in elementary school there was...we used to alternate in classes one and two, [first and second] being one and two on tests. And this other fellow was a very, very bright Latino guy. And it crossed my mind the other day how badly I felt: There was a spelling exam; I got 100%, he got 98%, and he told me that if he got it perfect, they'd accuse him of cheating. And he wasn't trying... He said, "If I get 100%, they'll accuse me of cheating".

JW: Because he was Latino?

KF: Yes. You know the school teachers in those days were something else. Most of them were right-wing Republicans and made no bones about it. All you'd hear from one teacher to another was how bad the New Deal is and how bad taxes are, all that stuff.

JW: Did you have pets as a child?

KF: We used to have a cat once, but I was never very pet-minded, still ain't.

JW: Was your sister or your mother very much into clothes? Spending a lot of money?

KF: No. My sister probably didn't spend...she had good taste. She used to buy me beautiful shirts for Christmas, but as a teenager she was just like any other teenager. I don't remember that being an issue. No one was ever criticised by blowing money on clothes.

JW: Did the family take trips out of town or out of the city?

KF: Yes. We used to go down to Carmel. Remember, my family had lived in Pacific Grove.

JW: Right.

KF: Well, they still had contacts in Carmel. And we used to take, on the Fourth of July, take the Sunshine Special, the train down to Santa Cruz. In 1940 I went down to Los Angeles with my mother on a bus. All of our travel was north or south, it wasn't east. That wasn't until I got in the Army.

JW: Would you say overall, as a younger child, before you got into high school, did you feel that you were better off or luckier than most other children, or about the same, or worse?

KF: About the same. I was luckier in some respects. I was kind of like my father, burning the candle at both ends. Now my brother and I were caddies, there's a golf course out there, Lincoln Park over at the Presidio. I was caddyding over at the Presidio when Pearl Harbor broke out. I guess it was in junior high school or somewhere around there because I was still kind of young. I first found out where South Park is. I bet you the average Black person to this day doesn't know where South Park is. Because a Black guy had a grocery store near there...this was during the beginning parts of World War II because I remember I used to have to handle all of the rationing crap for him. I was pretty good at it so he let me do it. So then the War came along...one of my friends got me started working down on the waterfront. When I was in high school, I was an All-City ball player, I was with the band and orchestra, and I also worked on the waterfront. Then I worked as a truck driver. I transferred over to the Army Transportation Corps and I became a diesel truck driver when I was sixteen, seventeen. They didn't ask too many questions during the War, and I was tall anyway. I made a particular point...Well, I had never been adolescent in the conventional sense at any rate. Maybe later but not while I should have been: There was too much at stake. So I was making big money as a truck driver. Only one thing used to haunt me. I had told them that I was going to City College...that's why I wanted to work nights ...not at Washington. But every now and then there would be an action photo of me on the green sheet, and I was afraid...everybody reads the newspaper and high school sports were still big in San Francisco. And I remember one time actually seeing myself in the green sheet in an action photo, but I was kind of covered, so it was kind of a side view. But if you read it, "Ken Finis, number so and so, dunking one for Washington". As I say, playing for Washington in those days was kind of grim, looking back. It wasn't any fun.

JW: What kind of work did you do on the waterfront?

KF: I worked on what they call a permit, as a longshoreman. In those days none of the unions were taking anybody in because they had just come out of the Depression and they all figured, 'Well, hell, when the War's over everybody is going to go back into the Depression'. And this had a lot to do with Black thinking too...I can remember shortly after the War, when it was considered kind of a tragedy for an ambitious young couple to have a baby. I remember one time looking at a...what the hell was it?... "Ebony". I remember in an early "Ebony", they did a study of the class of 1937 at Howard as compared to the class of 1937 at Harvard. The class of 1937 at Harvard had 2.4 something children. At Howard, that same Depression graduating class had point-point something children. (Laughs) They didn't even have one child per family. It was considered kind of irresponsible or unfortunate. For a while, they didn't have any children.

JW: How did people avoid having children? Was there much knowledge of birth control?

KF: Oh, yes. The diaphragm was around, the condom has been around. There wasn't the pill and the IUD. But people got over that once they felt that things weren't going to go back into where they had been in 1930. But there was a real fear, Black and White, about that.

JW: Moving on to adolescence now, did your friends change as you got into high school?

KF: Yes. I had new friends. They changed whenever you changed schools. But that was true across the board, for everybody. There were new alignments. But I was a very good mixer, I could travel with all kinds of circles, or travel in none. There is a side of me which is very gregarious, and another side which is a loner. And a lot of the memories which I recall are memories of being alone...by choice, by preference.

JW: What about when you got ready to start dating? Did the racial thing suddenly become a thing of moment?

KF: I think it was more my problem than White girls' problems.

JW: What about your mother?

KF: I remember a White girl came by and asked me to go to the show. My mother didn't care. My wife is White. She never knew my mother. My first wife was a Black girl, and our marriage broke up. We were just too godamn young...neither one of us had any business getting married.

JW: How old were you when you married?

KF: I was just barely twenty-one. She was maybe a couple of years older. I'd come out of World War II as a high-living jazz musician. And I was tired of it. I found out that I would never be a bona fide artist. I was more of a technician than an artist. And I got that out of my system by the time I was eighteen. So after I realized I wasn't going to be an artist, I had more fun. But at the age of eighteen living out of a suitcase got old to me. Now you figure Ellington, Basie, they've done that all their lives. But I realized that I was a very competent technician, but that's all I'd ever be. So that was okay. And I had a hell of a lot of fun, to the point that I was exhausted! (Laughs) If you ever slowed down in that kind of a scene, it all comes down on you at once.

JW: What kinds of organizations were you involved in in high school?

KF: Well, remember I told you I had a labor background and the waterfront was much more real to me than high school was.

JW: So you weren't involved in...

KF: Oh yes. I was involved in the band and the basketball team, the orchestra, all that kind of stuff. Those were the only redeeming things that made high school worthwhile. The dating thing, I could bypass that because, as a truck driver, either a truck driver or longshoreman, I got introduced to North Beach which was the perfect solution for me...perfect in one respect, anonymity. I think this was even more important than the race thing. A lot of people in the Richmond District...adults I'm talking about...knew me that I didn't know. Similarly in the Western Addition, a lot of friends of the family knew me and I didn't know them. And word would get back home, [murmurs in gossip-style] "You know what Ken did? I saw him...". (Laughs) But North Beach was perfect: Free love, no hang-ups. This was wartime now.

JW: What did you perceive to be the impact of all of these new Blacks from the South suddenly coming into the city?

KF: It didn't make any difference to me or my parents. But there were the natives, and "what have you" that it did. In my family it didn't make any difference. Neither my mother...and even though my father was dead, he wasn't the kind of person who'd care where someone was from---it was how he carried himself. And similarly my mother and the rest of my family. But there were families that saw this as a real threat: "All that we worked for for the last hundred years could easily go down the tube". Because naturally, the Blacks coming from the South, all they knew was segregation, so they were very easy to segregate. You see, one of the things we used to do here in San Francisco...very fair people would...what's the word I'm looking for...they would blend in with these White neighborhood improvement associations and find out what the hell was going on. And then they'd report back to the good old A.M.E. Church.

JW: [Unintelligible]

KF: Yes, the word "infiltrator" was something like they were. But this had been going on for years so that...For example, the classic example is when the...long before this time...after the 1915 Exposition the Blacks were offered the Marina if they would just all agree to move in there. Well, the people at the time knew that the Marina would be just exactly what Hunter's Point is now. And they said,

- KF: "Hell, no. You can do whatever you want to do with it". There were probably more Blacks living in the Marina then, 1915 say, during the Twenties and Thirties, than there are now, homeowners and what have you. But they had nothing to do with that segregation. They just repudiated that, out of hand. They [White realtors] could have built the Taj Mahal and what have you, and they would still not have moved in.
- JW: Why would the White community want to segregate the Black community?
- KF: They had always wanted to segregate the Blacks here. What the hell! Berkeley, Oakland, every place else was segregated...Los Angeles. I don't know about Seattle and those places. But San Francisco, a major city, it was the only city in the whole country that wasn't segregated. There's money in segregation.
- JW: How do you mean that?
- KF: Well, if you're compelled to live in a certain place, then they can charge you what they want to charge you. Right?
- JW: Right.
- KF: And they can let the place run down, but there's not a damn thing ...you can't move out of it, you see.
- JW: Sort of like Chinatown.
- KF: Yes.
- JW: It's somewhat unusual in the sense that you don't feel as though suddenly the Black community becomes ten times larger than it has been. How did that affect life on the waterfront and this kind of thing?
- KF: Well, it affected me very well in this sense: By the time I went to the Service, I had learned the ways and folkways on the waterfront. But I'll never forget going to Shepherd Field, Texas, on the train was a young kid from Stockton, a young Black kid from Stockton. You see, the generations go way, way back past the Gold Rush, of Black ranchers up and down the Valleys, both Valleys. Well, he was from one of those families. And there was a lot of integration in the Valley, intermarriage. But he hadn't been around them "levee-bank Blacks", see. But I had on the waterfront.
- JW: What was that term again?

KF: I just coined a term: Levee-bank Blacks...couldn't read or write. He'd never been around any, not in Stockton, not in the Valley. So he and I wound up at...I'll never forget pulling into Shepherd Field, it was probably during the summer because it was about seven, seven-thirty and it was still light. And we could hear the Blacks up at the Air Force base singing, "Oh, won't you come along, children, come along, while the moon is shining bright. Get on board down the river shore. We're gonna raise a ruckus tonight". The White troops were singing, "Up we go, into the wild blue yonder". (Laughs) It sounded like we were going into a slave compound. I remember some of those marching songs with the fondest reverence now. But at that time, you know, you're already in Texas: You know what they do to niggers in Texas? (Laughs) And we were perfectly set up for it, because as we came from this train, it was the most desolate, economically desolate part of Texas. You'd see people there, sharecroppers, Whites, with a little shack up on four boulders. Or three boulders. And you talk about a conditioning, coming from the Outer Richmond and all around you...I felt I could go right back to the Outer Richmond. I could go see shacks in the Valley or something, but I knew I was on my way back home. But here, mile after mile, out there on these run-down agricultural fields. And all that stuff that we'd seen in "Tobacco Road" came back. (Laughs)

JW: Did you have any contact in your teenage years with, we've kind of referred to it, but with people who were considered part of the underworld? I don't mean the glamorous, Hollywood underworld, but the Black Market, the dopers, pickpockets?

KF: No, that wasn't a big thing in San Francisco. That was the Tenderloin area which was largely White. There were Blacks down there too. But the Tenderloin area has always been...but it was an area more for organized crime. They always say there's no organized crime in San Francisco, But they would lock up the locals. What they would do...my brother told me when he was a cop...anybody from the outside, they would put him back on a train, or put him back on a plane. They just didn't get off in San Francisco. But, nevertheless, San Francisco has its own homegrown racketeers and so forth. But if you were going to have any trouble, you had to be a part of that group. It's like the Mafia is now. The Mafia doesn't go out snatching purses and things like that. That was unheard of. And dope was a White person's illness. Even in college, all the addicts I knew were all White. The only person I saw, a Black addict, was when I was a musician. And you'd get way out in the boondocks, Muleshoe, Texas...We played out there for those crackers down there, and, man, there'd be dope all around.

JW: You mean heroin or...?

KF: You name it.

JW: Marijuana or cocaine?

KF: Yes.

JW: All of them?

KF: Yes. It was wherever...Well, the drummer and I, kind of being insensitive to pot, for example, it just didn't do nothing for us. So when they set up a band with drinks, we'd drink all the drinks, you know. Pretty soon we'd...(Laughs).

JW: What about women on the streets, streetwalkers?

KF: That was Whites. That was Tenderloin. The Tenderloin was kind of a San Francisco version of a red-light district. But, until Billie Holiday got busted here in San Francisco, most Black people didn't know there was any dope in San Francisco.

JW: What was the relationship between the police in general and the Black community?

KF: As a kid, okay. As a matter of fact, my brother as a cop experienced ...he was on the police force sixteen years...he experienced far less racism, say, during his first five years than he did during the last five years.

JW: You mean racism from fellow officers or racism from the community?

KF: Within the Department. He worked for the Chief for about five years, and he was a one-man vice squad. He did all of this Baretta-type stuff.

JW: What years was this?

KF: Forty-seven, I guess he went in in forty-six or forty-seven.

JW: Was he the first Black to have entered the force?

KF: Yes.

JW: And he just went through by examination like you said. There was no political campaign to get him in?

KF: Oh, no. Where we had a struggle was with the Muni Railway. See, I worked for the Muni Railway when I got out, but before then; ask Audley Cole, we used to have to ride shotgun for him. I was a little young. I was on the tail end of that.

JW: So the Black community or Black people did not regard the police as any more their enemy than anyone else?

- KF: No. You know, there was such a low crime rate. It wasn't like Harlem. We'd all heard about Harlem. I've been to Harlem. Well, San Francisco still isn't Harlem.
- JW: But it had a reputation of being a "wild" town, because there were all these sailors and all these fancy people.
- KF: Yes, but that goes back to the Barbary Coast, North Beach. North Beach was also the "bohemian" center, it was an intellectual bohemian thing. The red-light area at that time, when I came along, was not North Beach...Well, there was the International Settlement which was kind of a tourist trap to clip people.
- JW: The International Settlement?
- KF: Yes, that was on Pacific Avenue between Columbus and Kearny. It was called the International Settlement. But in my grandmother's day and Aunt Maud's day, that was all the Barbary Coast. But it didn't have much to do with Black people. Black men, yes. They'd go get these White whores or something, you know.
- JW: Did you ever hear of "Mammy" Pleasant?
- KF: Oh, yes. She owned the house up here. Right up here on top of the hill.
- JW: I've heard that house belonged to her. Is that a verified "fact"? Did she ever live in it?
- KF: She owned it. Now whether she lived in it or not...The story is that it was given to her.
- JW: By whom?
- KF: By, I think, some White consort.
- JW: Oh. But your mother or father never ran into her?
- KF: She goes back into the 1850's.
- JW: She died in 1904. What about at the other end of the so-called "criminal elements" of society, you have the people who consider themselves Society with a capital "S". Was there such a thing in Black San Francisco?
- KF: Yes. It was much more rampant in the East Bay, status based on color. Not as much in San Francisco.
- JW: What were the Black "society" parties like?

KF: Dull. Very uptight. And they were kind of like their White counterparts, only even more so. Nothing was ever discussed at length or in depth.

JW: Like today's cocktail parties?

KF: Yes. Which used to bore the bejesus out of me. And the gals were all pretty, but you knew you'd have to go through all kinds of "changes" where you didn't have to go through those changes in North Beach.

JW: Did people resent the social leaders or did they just ignore them?

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- KF: [My parents'] generation, they had women's clubs. And the men had mostly the lodges or graduate chapters of undergraduate fraternities. My father couldn't care less about men's clubs. All he cared about was working and gardening and so forth. And my mother was part of a women's club. They used to have an annual Sunday brunch-type shindig with a night club entertainer. It was a lot of fun.
- JW: Do you remember the name of the club?
- KF: Josephine Cole might.
- JW: Was it the Cosmos, Phyllis Wheatley, Native Daughters, any of those?
- KF: No, the Cosmos was an old club, but I think they're more my generation. Josephine's mother was probably in it, Mrs. Foreman; so she would know about the name of that club. And my mother was part of together. Largely A.M.E. people. Josephine's a little older than me and she would remember a lot of these things that I don't
- JW: Do you think that the churches in general or the ministers made a positive or negative contribution overall?
- KF: I would say that during the Thirties, they made a very positive contribution. Remember I told you about...? It was the Church... it was Mrs. Herndon. By having the space there for anybody to talk about anything they wanted to, they kept the social issues alive. But some of the social issues may have been race, but others were political and economic and so forth. So anybody who wanted to could get up and say, "Well, here's what they're up to now. Have you heard this?"
- JW: Were there "radicals" in the Black community?
- KF: Yes. All the "radicals" in my generation all married Whites. That was a radical thing. (Laughs)
- JW: How organized were they? Were they affiliated with national parties?
- KF: There were Blacks in the Communist Party. My grandmother was a charter member to the People's World. She was working on the WPA, I remember that, when they formed in 193...
- JW: Your mother's mother or your father's mother?
- KF: My mother's mother. Yes, she was a charter subscriber to the People's World. And there was, during the Thirties, there was a lot of cooperation between Blacks and the Communist Party. It really wasn't repudiated until the Cold War.

- JW: What about Garvey? Did he have any followers out here?
- KF: No. Father Devine didn't either. I used to, when I was an altar boy, see all these A.M.E. bishops coming. What the hell were they coming from Philadelphia. To me that was like [coming] from India or somewhere. And here anything outside of California east was considered "back East". You'd go "back East" to Salt Lake. (Laughs)
- JW: You said that during the Thirties, the Black churches made a contribution. What happened after that?
- KF: I think during the Forties, say, after...I'm thinking particularly of the Cold War period...the churches largely became apolitical, all churches did. I was on the Muni Railway in...what was it?... forty-eight. We had our own strike in '48 and in '49 we all got kicked out of the C.I.O.: the I.L.W.U., us, the Transport Workers, and all these "liberals" were behind it. Guys like...who's that bastard?...Paul Jacobs. He was one of the principal architects and he was one of the government witnesses, and "fingered" us. Hubert Humphrey was mixed up in that, Walter Reuther and all those godamn "social democrats", "liberals". I remember we used to sing on the waterfront, "Workers of the world, arise! You have nothing to lose but your liberals." (Laughs) And that could come from a left-wing or a right-wing union. They don't know nothing about the working class.
- JW: What would you say is the source of your ethical beliefs?
- KF: I would say a good part came from the family...a politically and socially aware...I mean socially in the sense of socio-economic aware family, a left-leaning family.
- JW: Did your father ever encounter any obstacles to things he wanted to do because he was a leftist?
- KF: My father wasn't really so much of a "leftist", but he understood the left position. He was not an organization man of any kind. But he understood the left philosophy and, in principle, believed in it. But he was so remote, it's kind of hard to say.
- JW: Did you join any fraternity? I guess we weren't clear as to where you went to college.
- KF: Oh, I went to the old campus of San Francisco State. And I got an A.B. and a M.A. at the new campus.
- JW: In what subject?

- KF: Psychology. But I did most of my graduate work down at Stanford. I was down there for over four years, and I just had to quit and go to work.
- JW: And that was during what years?
- KF: Let's see, '47 to '54, somewhere in there.
- JW: Why did you chose psychology?
- KF: Like most clinical psychologists my age, we didn't start to become psychologists; we dabbled in this, that, and the other. I took up music for a while, not that I had planned to become a composer, even though I had thought about composition which was more "intellectual". But even to be a composer, you still have to be creative. There were a whole lot of different things that crashed about the same time. The whole bop movement had come in. So I thought I might play bass, learn to play bass, so I could put myself through school playing bass maybe. But I went to see Ellington one time, and what's-his-name was his bassist, and hell, he was playing the bass like a guitar. (Laughs) I came from the old swing thing: boom, boom, boom-boom-boom-boom. They didn't play it that way anymore. That whole bop movement wiped out an awful lot of musicians. Even Ellington, all the big bands went into hiding for about two or three years before they could grasp this whole bop movement.
- JW: Where was that coming from?
- KF: Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Clifford Brown. I guess you would say it was an Eastern movement.
- JW: Were they into this...sometimes these days it seems as if Black musicians are inspired by the fact that White musicians have successfully imitated them. So they're going to move rapidly into something else. Was that any motivation?
- KF: Well, I think that there were several things involved. To this day, I have never seen a young, Black Dixieland player. That whole stereotype thing, you know. I never, never to this day, have seen a young guy like your age...
- JW: I haven't either.
- KF: I've never either, okay. Lionel Hampton, in particular, was commercializing jazz, was bastardizing it. He had people falling off the stage, flying home, getting crazier and crazier. And in psychology or psychiatry you might call it a "reaction formation"...this highly technical change...instead of ordinary chords and so forth, you're into harmonic thirteenthths and all of these different kinds of chord

- KF: structures. They just wiped out, wiped the slate clean, anything which had anything to do with either the bastardization of jazz which Lionel Hampton and others had done. They don't even talk about Dixie-land. But I think there was a complete revulsion to what was happening to jazz in the early Forties and the cerebral types took over.
- JW: While you were in school...I'm not sure we answered the question of how you did get to be a psychologist.
- KF: Well, let's see. I had to quit and go to work. I couldn't stay and finish the Ph.D. program because I was running broke. I'd quit the Muni about six months or a year before and I was looking around for part-time jobs. When I screwed up, really, was Stanford offered me a job as a first-year student with the V.A. Well, you know, it was okay, but the V.A. was closing down at that time. This was around '50, '51. And the V.A. was letting people go. But what I should have done was taken a leave from the Muni. I had gotten merchant seaman papers. See, after World War II, any World War II vet could get seaman's papers. So I saw this as an easy way to test where I stood with the federal government, because at this time they started the Coast Guard screening. So I said, rather than apply for a federal job, I'll do it the easy way: I'll apply for something I ain't gonna use. So I went down and put in for an application for seaman's papers, and about three months later, here they came, to my shock and surprise...I thought I was more of a threat to the government than that. (Laughs) All of my friends were getting screened off the ships.
- JW: What were they doing?
- KF: They were being smeared as communists. People like Joe Johnson and Bill Chester, all these I.L.W.U. people. Most of them were seamen first. In the N.M.U. or the old Marine Cooks and Stewards. And they were screened off the ships for being "subversive".
- JW: What was your affinity with psychology?
- KF: It started out I guess with sociology. But this is typical of clinical psychologists of my generation. They didn't start out to become psychologists. A lot of them didn't get into psychology until they were juniors. I decided...I was very skeptical and cynical about psychoanalytic psychology. I had an interest in personnel, but as I got more and more into it, step by step...but for many years I was the only Black psychologist on the West Coast, for many, many years. I'd go to a convention and I'd be the only psychologist there, Black psychologist there. And, you see, when I went to school, the parents...by 1948 my mother was dead...A lot of Black families said, okay, say the kid wants to be an architect, or the kid wants to be a geologist. Well, the family's response was, "Well, that's all well and good, but have you ever seen one? Ever seen a Black architect? Are you sure you're going to make a living?" No, if you go into

- KF: medicine or law or engineering...engineering was open then... dentistry, social work, teaching. Anything other than that, the parents would kind of subtly and sometimes not so subtly, say, "Well, you know, godamn it, you've got to make a living, you know. You ever seen anybody around here hire a Black architect?" So now we pay for it now. When we put up a co-op from the Black trade unionists, we couldn't find a Black architect. People would come to you, "We need some Black city planners." [My response]..."I hope you find them." But because of that whole thing of "go where the ice is broken", that's why I was the only Black psychologist.
- JW: Was psychology then predominately Jewish?
- KF: It was predominately White. Stanford ain't no Jewish school, it's a Protestant school. It's every bit as much of a Protestant school, in retrospect, as Notre Dame is a Catholic school. They don't tell you that when you're there. Only in retrospect can you see it. It's a Presbyterian or Episcopal, whatever it is.
- JW: Did you join the Black fraternities on campus?
- KF: I did towards my graduation year. I felt myself being so thoroughly integrated that I was slowly but surely losing an element of precious Black identity. So, sensing this, I joined a Black fraternity, let's see, Alpha Phi Alpha.
- JW: Was this on the San Francisco State campus?
- KF: No, actually it was at U.C. campus. But the Alpha Phi Alpha chapter was Bay Area. It was regional rather than campus. But I thought, you know, I'd better do something.
- JW: Did you run into any kind of prejudice in the practice of psychology? Either on the part of co-workers or patients?
- KF: Well, the first prejudice I ran into was trying...they didn't want me to take a Civil Service exam, and the City tried everything they could think of just to keep me from applying. But they couldn't stop me because I had far more than they were asking. They were asking for a Master's degree. Well, I had a Master's plus four years in a doctoral program. Then I came out number one and from then on there was no...See, a lot of Blacks don't understand it. But under the Rule of One you're much better protected than under the Rule of Three. I had passed very high examinations for the State. I never got called because they could chose anybody out of three that they wanted to. It was only where they had the Rule of One, I came out number one, they had to hire me first, period. And it's backfiring in the NAACP's face now when they come up to...Well, we can get Affirmative Action by the Rule of Three. Well, it ain't working that way. It's working the way everybody knew it would work beforehand. Now they're up there in Sacramento talking about

KF: if there's going to be any lay-offs, we don't want them to be by seniority. Where are all those bus drivers, the old Black guys? You gonna take seniority away from them? (Laughs) You got to be crazy.

JW: What other incidents did you have in the practice of your field?

KF: I was the entire psychology department at San Francisco General Hospital for about twenty...no, I was the entire department for about eight to ten years, both for psychiatry and for the rest of the hospital. Then we got a bunch of new psychologists. The only time I've had any miniscule problem: There was a young gal of white Russian descent who didn't want to see me. So the staff said, "Well, you tell him, don't tell us." And it turned out that was because of her being a "furriner" she was trying to identify with the White prejudice. This wasn't her own prejudice, this was more a matter of conforming. So we got past that in one session. That's the only time it's come up to my knowledge.

JW: Do you find any difference in your relationship to Black clients and White clients, or Latino clients?

KF: No.

JW: So you got married at twenty-one, and did you have children from that marriage?

KF: No. Deliberately. I learned some important things in that marriage. When I was at State College, where couples had married before they had gone to college...In those days, we didn't know anything about family therapy...I was one of the pioneers in that too, but we didn't have a name for it. The husband would go to college; he starts changing his ideas, his points of view: He starts knocking religion and this and that and the other, and the wife doesn't. She fights it, but she fights in a female way. She doesn't come out and just counterattack. When he's talking about something of importance to him that he's heard about in school, she'll start talking about the pretty blouse she saw downtown. (Laughs) The crisis would come at State College when this guy, he loved his wife, but she bores the shit out of him, and he's met some of them co-eds who don't bore him. Then comes the great crisis. We never saved one of those marriages. The guy didn't really want to leave his wife, but it just became impossible.

JW: What do you do exactly? How do people come to you and under what circumstances? And what do you attempt to do for them in your work?

KF: Well, my work is growth oriented. People come in crisis, particularly Black people. I have a small private practice. I see people in here. We've been doing a lot of remodeling that's why the floor is all messed up...it's changed. It used to be that with the

KF: private patients, the Black person would come for a clear and present problem. Once that clear and present problem was resolved, which might be in rather short order, they would usually come when there was a crisis: Somebody's considering getting a divorce and it seems like it's irrevocable. Or there's some kind of family crisis, that's when Black...Very few people just come for "treatment" because they are interested in it. Nine out of ten people, and ten out of ten Black people come because they're having some clear and present problem.

JW: In other words they don't see the problem as being connected with the rest of their lives?

KF: Well, put it this way. In Black communities there are so damn many other problems. There are so many social and economic problems, housing, jobs and so forth. So many "out there" problems. I did community psychology from '68 to '74. I kept that in mind that I had the northeast area. "Out there", mental health isn't their number one priority. Housing is, and things like that. So if I could relate to them and their priorities, then sooner or later they'd listen to what I was there for.

JW: Do you find that Black people define mental health or what is a healthy person more liberally or more strictly than other people? Or just differently?

KF: Black people in psychological areas tend to be rather conservative. Black people tend to be liberals economically, but in a lot of other areas, say, education, Black people are very conservative. They believe in reading, writing and arithmetic. You can take "dance" some other time. (Laughs) And morality...I would say that the intact Black family of whatever class tends to be more conservative about personal, particularly sexual, morality. Young Black women tend to be...one of the problems young Black women have had with young White women is that young White women: Young Black women tend to be less accessible for a quick romp in the hay than similar age White women, at least in San Francisco. So you hear them complaining about, 'You go up there to the college, you see all these young guys with White girls'. Well, it wasn't them [the Black men]. The gals selected them. Whereas a lot of the Black gals were sitting around waiting to be selected. Because I remember myself, when I was in college...you see, I didn't have to worry about high school girls. When you asked me that thing about dating, I didn't date high school girls much because I had North Beach. I had a couple of dates with maybe one White, one Black, like that. High school girls kind of turned me off, because I had all these other things going on. So, I had this kind of juvenile notion of "free" girls

- KF: and "uptight" girls. I had this dichotomy. So I relayed that to college too. But I shortly saw after that this was my problem, not theirs. This was in the late Forties. I found out very quickly that this was more my problem than their problem. People looking at you funny on the streets and stuff like that.
- JW: How do you think that Black people look at deviance? Are they tolerant of it or less tolerant?
- KF: For example?
- JW: Oh, people who are...retarded people, homosexual people, alcoholic people?
- KF: Well, no, you see, you have different kinds of problems. I would say with retarded people they would be compassionate. With..."homophobia" just doesn't exist. 'Let them go do what they want to do', but that's not a major issue with Black people. You go to Black bars, working-class bars, and you don't see any obvious homosexuals. But there's never any talk about homosexuals. I think Blacks would be inclined, if they could, to see that as a White person's problem. If they could. But it's not really a pressing problem unless it comes up in the family or something. Alcoholism, you know, that's a sin. And having been at the hospital for twenty-one years off and on, you didn't see too many Black alcoholics out there. Unless they were Eddy Street types. But the working-class Black alcoholics, very, very seldom.
- JW: What was the interval between your first and second marriage?
- KF: Oh, boy. That's a good question. Seems like it was a long time. The number seven comes to mind.
- JW: Where did you meet your second wife?
- KF: Through friends. We were all going to an NAACP meeting. And they were friends that I had come to know that she had known earlier in New York. And then June came here. I met June in 1955. And we got married in '58. There was a good seven years between marriages.
- JW: Did you ever think about the fact that San Francisco was one of the few places you could live in this country in 1958 as a "mixed" marriage?
- KF: Well, I had been around the rest of the country and I wasn't impressed. The only place that impressed me was New York, and that was in 1946. I knew a lot of people in the Village that I had known from North Beach here. But the rest of the cities were just big grey, dull places to me. The only place that had an attraction to me was New York because of course it had the Village like you had in San Francisco.

KF: A lot of other similar things. But remember I told you about hot weather. I don't know how I could take that New York summertime. I had to make a decision that I'd go east to the Sorbonne in Paris, or that I'd go back to San Francisco.

JW: When did you have to make this decision?

KF: When I got discharged in North Carolina.

JW: Do you speak French?

KF: No. But I could learn it easily enough. I had no misgivings about that.

JW: Why did the Sorbonne come to mind?

KF: Well, because I'd know people from North Beach who had gone to the Sorbonne.

JW: I see.

KF: And it sounded like the kind of swinging, of "bohemian-type" swinging scene, not American swinging, but the bohemian type, the international type. The International Settlement...well, that was something else. So I'd read about the Americans in Paris and so forth and so on. And that seemed like...I tried to get stationed there for occupation duty. Oh, my friend from Stockton...I never did tell you the end of the story there...He kept getting in trouble. You see, by the time we went in, all of the guys who had any formal education were coming out. So we were what was left. And he and I were probably the only ones who even had a high school education. And these were strictly field hand, riverbank type, plain old cotton-picking type field hands. Man, this cat couldn't relate to these fieldhands... he didn't know what they were talking about.

END TAPE

[The following is the second interview session with Mr. Kenneth Finis conducted in his office on Van Ness Avenue on July 21, 1978.]

JW: I want to talk briefly about how you met your spouse? Under what circumstances? Oh, you told me. At an NAACP meeting.

KF: Yes.

JW: And her maiden name was?

KF: June Groth. G-r-o-t-h.

JW: And what was it that impressed you about her?

KF: Well, we had certain interests in common.

JW: Such as?

KF: She was interested in jazz and I was too and, of course, there was the physical attraction but at that point my interest was not particularly profound.

JW: How long was it after you met her that you married her?

KF: About three years.

JW: Would you tell me again what her family background was?

KF: She was born and raised in Cincinnati of a family on both sides of German ancestry. However, most of her relatives have been in this country for a least the Civil War, but I think one of her grandmothers came from Germany much, much later. Basically, that's what I know about her family.

JW: Were they middleclass? Was she middleclass? [Unclear]

KF: Well, probably in a sense of being lower middleclass. Her father was a sheet metal mechanic who became a contractor. Her mother was always a housewife.

JW: What was her educational background?

KF: When I met her she had graduated from college, the University of Cincinnati, and done graduate work at Columbia.

JW: In what field?

KF: In nursing, particularly public health nursing.

- JW: Since this is the United States... [Unclear]...did you encounter any particular problems either from your family and friends, her family, her friends?
- KF: Neither my family or our mutual friends...we met through mutual friends. When we got married, her family in Ohio was upset.
- JW: Had they met you?
- KF: No.
- JW: It was just the fact that you were Black?
- KF: Yes. They had seen me through photographs that my wife had sent home in which we had been in with another couple on vacation in Mexico. I did not learn of that until sometimes afterwards, and at that time was kind of unnerved at the possible implications.
- JW: When did you get married?
- KF: March 1, 1958.
- JW: In going out socially, particularly to places where you are not known, has San Francisco been generally nonchalant, welcoming or hostile?
- KF: From my perspective, generally San Francisco could have cared less. From my wife's perspective, she used to feel uncomfortable sometimes with people who would look at her and look at our daughter. Our daughter looks like me...more like...she has...when my daughter was little and no one ever said anything to her and no one ever otherwise offended her, but she did feel self-conscious being stared at.
- JW: What was her reception on the part of Black women?
- KF: No problem that I ever knew of. She's never said anything. She has a number of...and always has had...well, she has...since we got married, she's had a number of Black women close friends and still does.
- JW: What about your daughter? You have one daughter?
- KF: Yes.
- JW: And she is how old?
- KF: She's eighteen.
- JW: [Unintelligible]

KF: Yes.

JW: Has she encountered any problems or do psychologists think she has any identity problems as a product of, quote, "mixed marriage"?

KF: None that I can see. She has friends of all ethnic groups. There were...during her public school days, she did get some offenses from Black female school children, but some of her closest friends are Black females. She has friends who are...a good number of her friends are Third World.

JW: What kind of offense? I mean, what...[unintelligible.]

KF: Well, my hunch is that it was something that maybe I had experienced in high school, that she didn't confine herself to the Black group totally, one hundred percent.

JW: [Unintelligible]

KF: Yes. Obviously she's been raised in an integrationist family, and it would not be a prototype to confine herself to one group.

JW: When you said that the radicals of the Thirties and Forties...[unintelligible]...across the color line, did that in any way affect you?

KF: No, I don't think it was necessarily a deliberate thing to marry someone White. It was a matter of marrying whoever in the hell you want to marry. The hell with what society says. There were as many Black radicals who didn't as there were who did.

JW: How were major decisions made in the family in terms of when and where you wanted to make a major purchase, where to go on vacation ...[unintelligible]?

KF: We have had over the years family conferences among the three of us on any kind of major decisions and I think that with June and myself...[unintelligible]...where we're going to live and buying a house, and going on vacation.

JW: It seems she was never in any real need for liberation.

KF: [Unintelligible] She might talk that talk at times, but she's been a housewife most of her life. I mean, most of our marital life, and tends to work parttime at jobs that interest her, but she ...as long as it doesn't interfere with her gardening and sewing.

- JW: Did you have any specific guidelines and criteria when you discovered that you were going to be a father? Were there things that you wanted to avoid in child-rearing or things you wanted to imitate?
- KF: The primary thing I was interested in as a parent was that my child, and as it came to be a daughter, had a good sense of self-esteem and one of the...one of the measures of that is expecting people to like her. Generally speaking, she has...I have not seen her immobilized by shyness. She seems reasonably assertive. As of today she's on vacation by herself for the first time and Wednesday graduated from cosmetology college. She's been going to City College virtually fulltime, and cosmetology college virtually fulltime, and we did not like...Some people stress intellectual development as much as a sense of well-being. She's a very bright kid, but also a very practical-minded kid. We did not stress her being an intellectual giant. She could always get A's if she wanted to.
- JW: [Unintelligible.] Has your daughter ever expressed any anxiety or confusion about what her relationships should be with other Afro-Americans?
- KF: I don't think she has ever thought of it in terms of what it should be. She feels equally at home with pleasant people, Black or Third World or whatever, as far as I can see. As far as causes are concerned, because she has seen her parents' involvement, I think that she does identify with what she would see as legitimate [unintelligible.]
- JW: For example, I know we are talking about a relatively young person, and we don't expect a full political development...[unintelligible.]
- KF: Yes. She has been with me walking picket lines when she was little, and on demonstrations, human rights demonstrations and so forth. There might be some things that might be fad that she might consider frivolous that her peers would consider important.
- JW: All in all, you would not say that the fact that you have maintained successfully an interracial marriage for the last twenty years has not posed the kind of problems that Ann Landers or other people that ...[unintelligible] ...lead us to believe.
- KF: No, I think that the Black/White marriages have the...at least in San Francisco...have the same problems that any marriage has more so than it being predominantly a Black/White...I think of the Black/White couples that I know that their problems don't seem to be any different than all White or all Black couples.

- JW: Why do you think it seems to be outside of Hollywood the general trend is for Black males to marry White females rather than White females...White men marrying Black women? [Unintelligible]
- KF: Oh, I don't think that's so true and I'm thinking of one couple... I can think of several couples where the guy is White. I think that women probably have a lot more to do with who marries who than men think they have. I think that the Black men have felt that they have been the moving party whereas the thing, particularly there in San Francisco and the Bay Area, whereas White women have seen an untouched field and have moved into the pasture of Black men, probably more so than Black women have moved into the pasture of White men. I think that I've seen it...observed it as a person but I've also seen it happen with patients of mine that those who have never hardly said more than hello...they get the idea, "Well, if I can see a Black shrink, there's a pasture that I've been overlooking. (Chuckle)
- JW: Also, in the first interview, we talked about the Black society so to speak, how would you say...how did the great majority of Blacks regard this group...the bourgeoisie elite? Did they resent these people or ridicule them or ignore them, emulate them?
- KF: I think that the Black bourgeoisie in San Francisco, if not California, is a much more fluid, uncrystallized group than you might find in the mid-West, South or East. That being a member of the Black bourgeoisie might have more to do with who you're recognized by...oh, for example, invited to a meeting by...than anything resembling a cast system.
- JW: In other words, family name has less to do with it?
- KF: Oh, yes.
- JW: One does not necessarily get born into the Black bourgeoisie...one has to achieve bourgeoisie membership?
- KF: Yes. The...I'd say it's much more open, fluid...People can identify with this group by their own efforts, not upon name recognition or birth, but by some kind of personal achievement in the bourgeoisie sense.
- JW: How would you classify your general political view point? Liberal, radical, Socialist, Marxist, Conservative?
- KF: Well, I would probably believe that in many respects Left parties have had a great deal to do with my political orientation and among the Left parties, say for the last ten to twenty years, that may have influenced a good deal of my labor and professional thinking...probably have been the anarchosynaclist[?].

JW: Who are represented in the Bay Area by whom?

KF: Very few people. (Chuckle) In the Bay Area, San...in California, the influential party here during the Thirties and Forties was the Communist Party. Nationally, I understand that the Communist Party had more to do with New Deal policies than any other Left party. The Socialists that had been big on the East Coast were never big here. The anarchists of any kind have never been much recognized where you have Marxists. You can go into a Marxist bookstore and you will never see anything by an anarchist writer.

JW: Who are your leading anarchist writers?

KF: Mostly in Europe...England, Italy, France...but they are as much suppressed by the Left there as they were in the Revolution. In Russia they were the Vanguard in the Revolution, but were suppressed, repressed, oppressed by Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and others.

JW: What I'm striving...[unintelligible] Do you subscribe to the view that America is essentially a society of oppressors and oppressed, and where would you put the Black bourgeoisie into...[unintelligible]?

KF: If there was a scheme, I would say they would be part of the oppressed, you know.

JW: But do you subscribe to that feeling that the rich live by virtue of the sweat of the poor?

KF: Well, the anarchist would say not only the rich but government exists for their own benefit, not for the benefit of the people...Left and Right governments. You can see why the anarchists are so unpopular. (Chuckle.)

JW: I would ask if there are any alternatives, but we won't go into that now.

KF: Well, they would cite examples like during war and revolutions the mail goes through just like it did without. During World War II, if you wanted to write to a German soldier...[unintelligible]... and he'd get it in the trenches. They say that governments don't really contribute anything but exist for their own perpetuation.

JW: But do you think that it is accurate to portray America as an oppressive society...[unintelligible]?

KF: I think that in some places this is not simply a Black perspective but certainly a labor perspective that there is the iron hand with the velvet glove.

JW: Manifested through what, wealthy capitalists?

KF: Yes. That would be a part of it, you know.

JW: But I'm talking in terms of the issue of consumerism or the...
[unintelligible]...what explains that phenomena?

KF: Well, I think...

JW: Getting into debt and that kind of thing?

KF: I think at the...the American aristocracy are not lords and dukes and counts. The American aristocracy are the owners of finance. The American aristocracy are not even owners of manufacturing and production. The aristocracy of America are those who control the money. The Ford family or General Motors Corporation have to go to the Mellons or the Rockefellers and others for money and while Standard Oil is a production company, the Rockefellers influence and control is largely through finance. So you have the triumphant of the finance capital and labor, both of which are under the control of the ruling elite in this country which are the financiers.

JW: Could you briefly tell me what particular labor organizations or activities...[unintelligible]...?

KF: Well, I've been involved with...I've been a member of the Transport Workers Union and a member of San Francisco City and County Employees Union. I was president of the City and County Employees Union, Local 400, during most of the Sixties, and the style of my leadership and the organization of the union were along the lines of the IWW which was the Industrial Workers of the World which was an anarchist/synechist group, the emphasis being on one big union and [unintelligible] We did not intend to make the mistakes that the [unintelligible] had made. The IWW was more of a guerrilla group... [unintelligible] fantastic strike but did not occupy. They didn't sign contracts. They didn't believe in contracts. They felt that a contract merely gives the owners a period of rest. They were a revolutionary entity. They are not a business entity. Somewhere in between the business union and the revolutionary union we kind of stick. (Laughs) I was invited to Canada in 1965 to speak upon the civil rights movement here in this country. And the subject matter of my discussion there was to compare the labor movement and the civil rights movement in the sense that the labor movement tended to move like an army with front lines, rear lines, supplies, administration whereas, the civil rights movement moved like a guerrilla force. A raid was made on Selma. A raid was made on Birmingham, but they did not have the occupation powers of a regular army such as the Labor movement. The Labor movement doesn't move as fast but it can occupy the territory once it's there. This was

KF: a problem of the civil rights movement that could have been aided and abetted by the labor movement if they trusted one another.
[Unintelligible]

JW: [Unintelligible]

KF: (Chuckle.) Hell, I was president of the Local.

JW: [Unintelligible]

KF: Well, this is one of the things that divide, say, the Black bourgeoisie from the labor movement, is that the people who have never held a union card are very quick to denounce the labor movement as racist. This is why we have had here in San Francisco trouble with the Black bourgeoisie is that someone in someone's family encountered discrimination and the Black bourgeoisie are very quick to take an anti-labor point of view. We have had trouble with the NAACP... historical trouble with the NAACP supplying scabs during strikes. We had a...we've had difficulties with the NAACP and similar organizations in problems involving Black workers. For example, the NAACP's position appears to have been that seniority should be dumped. Black workers know better. The only thing they have is seniority. For example, the Longshoremen are a...in San Francisco, the majority are Black. On the Muni Railway, the transport workers, the majority appear to be Black. When I used to work there after World War II, about ten percent of the work force of the Muni was Black. This is true of other unions. The cement workers, the cement masons, the very skilled cement masons largely are Black and certainly seniority. But people who never had to depend upon seniority can be very scornful of it and other similar things.

JW: What do you think is the impact of [unintelligible?]

KF: Oh, it had a tremendous...you mean the civil rights movement in the South?

JW: Yes.

KF: Yes, I can think of some classical examples where we had scores of people from San Francisco, hundreds of them, going to the South to participate in freedom rides, demonstrations, what-have-you. I'm a clinical psychologist and I was at the San Francisco General Hospital where we had a contingent of fifty people that went from San Francisco General Hospital down to Selma, I believe...mostly White but not exclusively. There were a lot of Black people who went down, particularly young people. An interesting thing took place one time when the...I think it was at the...when the civil rights marchers were in Montgomery. A whole bunch of nurses came to join up in the union. Our union had obtained a reputation of being a militant union, a vanguard union. So they all came running over... tied me down at my office until about seven o'clock that night. I couldn't sign them up fast enough. The civil rights did a lot for the labor movement, particularly in the public section and to

KF: a considerable extent the private section. There were certain local unions that there were problems in which they were forced to deal with regularly. But, for example, you can't talk about international unions in terms of their local problems. In the mid-West, Jimmy Hoffa had a tremendous support from Black people [unintelligible] Out here, several of the locals were Jim Crow...lilly-White locals [unintelligible] but not so in the mid-West. Similarly with the Longshore Association. Along the Gulf and South Atlantic, most of the locals of the ILA are Black. So that you can't generalize from the experience of a local here or a local there.

JW: Do you think that psychology is beneficial generally...[unintelligible?]

KF: Oh, there's no question that the psychological problems of individuals are related to not only social but community crisis. For such simple things as building freeways through a poor, working class area. When you disrupt a community with poor people, their existence is around that community. They seldom leave that community except to go to work somewhere. But everything else they utilize...grocery store, barber shop, laundromat, is in that community and that gets bulldozed out. This happens during the first stage of redevelopment except...the exception is that the homeowners, landowning, organized labor Blacks...[unintelligible.]

JW: So, are you in a sense [unintelligible?]

KF: Hopefully, psychology helps people to survive [unintelligible.] Hopefully, the objective in psychotherapy is to help people to grow and [unintelligible] so that they can be more productive. Remember this: If a revolutionary is considering a revolution, a well-integrated revolutionary is a whole lot better than a neurotic, adventure. (Chuckle.) And there has been a lot of adventurism in this country as opposed to solid revolutionary thought. Some of the organizations have been more adventurers than they have been revolutionary in terms of shootouts and what-have-you.

JW: What places outside the United States, and inside the United States have you not yet [unintelligible?]

KF: Well, of course, I would like to see Africa. Probably any place in the world that I haven't been. There are some places in Europe that I would like to see, and China. I think that given a hard choice, it would be Africa and Third World countries.

JW: [Unintelligible?]

KF: Interest and concern in the...say in Africa, the part of a roots [unintelligible.] Also to see contrasts. I would imagine in some respects going to Paris would be kind of like going to New York.

JW: [Unintelligible.]

KF: (Chuckle)

JW: If you had to live the first twenty years of your life over again, would you change anything? If so, what?

KF: Well, I wouldn't want to relive it again, but I look upon my first twenty years as pretty fortunate. I have been largely lucky. I happened to be in the right place at the right time.

- JW: There are not any specific decisions that were made [unintelligible]
- KF: Well, you asked me about my first twenty years. Subsequently, there may have been some things. (Chuckle.)
- JW: How do you think basically that San Francisco has changed [unintelligible?]
- KF: Well, I think that San Francisco has clung much to its identity. Like most San Franciscans tend to be San Franciscans first and foremost. And there have been a great many reforms for Black people in San Francisco. Added on to the earlier struggles, San Francisco Blacks have been able to understand the concepts of Black power and utilize it. There are certain features of the growth and development of San Francisco that are sad [unintelligible.]

[JW: The listener has probably noticed by now a change in the speed and quality of voices on this recording. This resulted from increasingly weak batteries. In fact, the last ten or fifteen minutes of the session did not, unfortunately, record at all. My apologies to the public and particularly to Mr. Finis for an abrupt end to a very interesting interview.]

END

